



SCHOOL CLIMATE AND STUDENTS OUTCOME

Mrs. Pramila Kumari¹ | Dr. Poonam Dhull²

¹ Research Scholar (JRF), Department of Education, M.D.U. Rohtak.

² Assistant Professor, RLS College of Education, Sidhrawali (Gurgoan).

ABSTRACT

School climate has been reported to have a direct relationship with students' academic performance and teachers' productivity. Then, what are those factors that constitute the healthy climate? Won't it be better for education stakeholders to harness the good potentials of the healthy climate to ensure better academic achievement and productivity? The fact worthy of note is that school climate constitutes humans and materials. The interactions between and amongst the human and material entities determine the school climate. Well informed parents consider the school's climate before enrolling their wards.

Academic achievement generally refers to a child's performance in academic areas (e.g. reading, writing language arts, and math). The definition of academic achievement refers to the level of schooling you have successfully completed and the ability to attain success in your studies.

Academic achievement is commonly measured by examinations or continuous assessment but there is no general agreement on how it is best tested or which aspects are most important — procedural knowledge such as skills or declarative knowledge such as facts.

KEY WORDS: School Climate, Student Achievements, Caring Relationship.

Introduction:

School climate refers to the quality and character of school life as it relates to norms and values, interpersonal relations and social interactions, and organizational processes and structures. School climate sets the tone for all the learning and teaching done in the school environment and, as research proves, it is predictive of students' ability to learn and develop in healthy ways.

School climate may be defined as an aggregate measure of school's characteristic, such as relationships between parents, teachers and administrators, as well as the physical facilities on ground i.e. provided by the school administration / management to the students. It could be seen as the overall interaction resulting from human relationships with each other and with the physical facilities in the school environment. Climate refers to the atmosphere in an organization. It affects the morale and personal satisfaction of all persons involved in the public schools. Climate reflects how staff, student and community feel about a school and/or the district—Whether it is a positive place or one that is full of problems. "Any one who spends time in schools quickly discovers how one school can feel different from other schools. School climate is a general term that refers to the feel, atmosphere, tone, ideology or milieu of a school.

The National School Climate Council (2007) defines school climate as "norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe" (p.4). School climate is a product of the interpersonal relationships among students, families, teachers, support staff, and administrators. Positive school climate is fostered through a shared vision of respect and engagement across the educational system. Emphasis is also placed on the collective sense of safety and care for the school's physical environment. A related concept is school culture, which refers to the "unwritten rules and expectations" among the school staff (Gruenert, 2008).

The National School Climate Center identifies five elements of school climate: i.e.

- (1) **Safety** (e.g., rules and norms, physical security, social-emotional security);
- (2) **Teaching and learning** (e.g., support for learning, social and civic learning);
- (3) **Interpersonal Relationships** (e.g., respect for diversity, social support from adults, social support from peers);
- (4) **Institutional Environment** (e.g., school connectedness, engagement, physical surroundings); and
- (5) **Staff Relationships** (e.g., leadership, professional relationships).

Freiberg and Stein (1999) described school climate as the heart and soul of the school and the essence of the school that draws teachers and students to love the school and to want to be a part of it. This renewed emphasis on the importance of school climate was further reinforced by a meta-analysis study performed by

Wang et al. (1997), which found that school culture and climate were among the top influences in affecting improved student achievement. Their study also found that state and local policies, school organization and student demographics exerted the least influence on student learning.

According to Hoy and Tarter (1997), unhealthy schools are deterred in their mission and goals by parental and public demands. Unhealthy schools lack an effective leader and the teachers are generally unhappy with their jobs and colleagues. In addition, neither teachers nor students are academically motivated in poor schools and academic achievement is not highly valued. Healthy schools that promote high academic standards, appropriate leadership and collegiality provide a climate more conducive to student success and achievement (Hoy et al. 1990). The overwhelming majority of studies on school climate in the past have focused on teachers and leader-teacher relations and subsequent issues of job satisfaction. Miller stated 14 years ago that school climate has rarely been studied in relation to its effect on student achievement (Miller 1993). In recent years the emphasis on climate has shifted from a management orientation to a focus on student learning (Sergiovanni 2001). The reform efforts of the last 30 years have failed to improve student achievement in schools because they failed to adequately address the importance of the culture and climate of schools (DuFour and Eaker 1998). The first major purpose of a school is to create and provide a culture that is hospitable to human learning (Barth 2001). Structural changes made to improve schools without addressing the culture and organizational health of schools have predictably not been successful (Sarason 1996).

Although it is difficult to provide a concise definition for school climate, most researchers agree that it is a multidimensional construct that includes physical, social, and academic dimensions.

The physical dimension includes:

1. Appearance of the school building and its classrooms;
2. School size and ratio of students to teachers in the classroom;
3. Order and organization of classrooms in the school;
4. Availability of resources; and z Safety and comfort.

The social dimension includes:

1. Quality of interpersonal relationships between and among students, teachers, and staff;
2. Equitable and fair treatment of students by teachers and staff;
3. Degree of competition and social comparison between students; and
4. Degree to which students, teachers, and staff contribute to decision-making at the school.

The academic dimension includes:

1. Quality of instruction;
2. Teacher expectations for student achievement; and
3. Monitoring student progress and promptly reporting results to students and parents.

Why is School Climate Important?

A positive school climate also has benefits for teachers and education support professionals (Bradshaw, Waasdorp et al., 2010). Research shows that when educators feel supported by their administration, they report higher levels of com-

mitment and more collegiality (Singh & Billingsley, 1998). Likewise, schools where educators openly communicate with one another, feel supported by their peers and administration, and establish strong student-educator relationships tend to have better student academic and behavioral outcomes (Brown & Medway, 2007). School climate effects also have the potential of increasing job satisfaction and teacher retention, which is a major concern given the high rate of turnover in the field of education (Boe et al., 2008; Kaiser, 2011).

How to Make or Break a School Climate:-

We have various elements or factors that directly or indirectly affect the school climate. We have categorized these factors as per below mention table

Factors that will damage a school climate	Factors that will restore a school climate
Lack of leadership, vision, mission and goals Absence of clear purpose Unfair enforcement of rules Poor working relations between school and community Abundance of unreasonable rules Autocratic administration Board of education that pushes personal agenda Too demanding teachers union Leaving parents and students out of communication links No community support Stagnation Top-down management Non collaborative, non-cooperative behaviors by school leaders Budget deficit Conflict over limited resources Strikes Loss of social and emotional togetherness	Good sense of direction Positive board support Consistent credibility Knowledgeable communicative leader Rewarding risk taking Positive exchange of ideas Integrity training Empowerment leadership team Exciting, clear goals for students Allowing time for staff to identify and internalize missions Belief in the school Good teacher negotiation Feelings of involvement and goals tuned into by common funding Unified common goal Staff addressing problems cooperatively

Note. Source: Gonder & Hymes, 1994.

How is School Climate Measured?

Given the importance of positive school climate for students and educators, it is essential for schools to monitor school climate on a regular basis. Several tools have been developed to assess students, parents, and educators perspectives on school climate. The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments has created an online compendium of research-based school climate measures, including surveys to be completed by students, parents, and educators. One such measure included in the collection is the California Healthy Kids Survey, which assesses school connectedness, opportunities for meaningful participation, and perceptions of safety across elementary, middle, and high school. The Comprehensive School Climate Inventory also measures multiple elements, including an orderly school environment, parent/community involvement, collaboration within the school, and instructional practices. Other assessments, such as the Communities That Care Youth Survey, gather data on school, community, family, and peer risk and protective factors related to perceptions of school climate. There have been relatively few observational tools developed to measure school climate, although measures of school engagement and student-educator interactions may tap into aspects of school climate (Pianta et al., 2008).

When assessing school climate, educators should consider the following key factors:

Choose a reliable and valid assessment:- School climate has multiple features (e.g., safety, interpersonal relationships, and physical environment); thus, survey instruments should reflect the multi-dimensional nature of the school's culture. Schools should aim for a survey that addresses the emotional, physical, and behavioral aspects of school climate.

Assess annually:- School climate should be assessed on an annual basis; thus, surveys should be easy to administer.

Survey across perspectives:- In order to get a comprehensive view of the school, multiple perspectives need to be assessed. Students, families, teachers, administrators, and education support professionals should be involved in the school climate assessment.

Communicate findings:- An often overlooked, but critical step in the assessment process is sharing the results with the school community. School-wide presentations, community discussions, PTA meeting presentations, and classroom discussions will help gain buy-in for school climate initiatives and future planning.

Take action:- A core reason for collecting data on school climate is to use it to guide decision-making related to the selection of evidence-based approaches for improving school climate and, more broadly, for informing school improvement efforts which match the school's unique needs.

Repeat:- Re-assess the school climate annually, celebrate improvements, and plan for the next phase of school climate enhancements.

How Can Schools Improve the Climate?

Once a school has measured the school climate and identified areas for improvement (e.g., increased supervision in hallways, professional development on cultural diversity), educators need to consider ways to change the school norms, values, and expectations. Integrated and multi-tiered models are often the most effective approaches (Greenberg et al., 2001; O'Connell et al., 2009). Although there is no one-size-fits-all program, there are common features of evidence-based practices related to school climate enhancement like :-

Multi-tiered framework:- Although the use of a single, targeted program may change specific problem behaviors in the school (e.g., bullying), there is growing interest in the use of multi-component approaches which provide a continuum of programs and support services in order to both target behavior problems and address the broader social ecology of the school.

Communication across partners:- Research indicates that prevention programs are not only more effective, but are more likely to be sustained over time if the entire school community (students, staff, and administrators) contributes to developing the program (Greenberg et al., 2003; Rigby, 2007).

Assess school climate from multiple perspectives:- Parents, students, and staff often differ in their perceptions of the school climate (Bradshaw et al., 2009; Waasdorp et al., 2011). While some may debate which perspective is more accurate, it is important to understand multiple viewpoints on school climate, including areas of convergence and divergence.

Data-based decision making:- In order to effectively address the emotional and behavioral needs of a school, several different types of data need to be utilized. These data include, but are not limited to: student, parent and staff surveys, discipline data (e.g., office discipline referrals, suspensions), school-wide observational data, as well as school demographics (e.g., enrollment, student mobility). This information can inform decisions about implementation of universal, selective, and targeted prevention programs.

Caring Relationship: A Precondition for Learning → A positive school environment is built upon caring relationships among all participants—students, teachers, staff, administrators, parents and community members.

Student-Teacher Relationships → No factor is more important for positive school outcomes than the children's perception of the teacher's attitude toward them. When students believe that their teachers care about them, see them as competent, respect their views and desire their success, they tend to work toward fulfilling those high expectations.

Student-Student Relationships → School is the primary social structure for children. Friendships and social relationships with peers are a central part of students' lives. A positive school environment encourages communication and interaction and does not tolerate harassment, bullying or violence of any kind.

Teacher-Staff-Administrator Relationship → Positive relationships—based on trust, respect and support—among school adults are essential to professional fulfillment and school success. An atmosphere of collegiality influences teachers' efficacy, satisfies emotional needs, and leads to personal and professional learning. Teachers and staff need to enjoy their work and be willing to contribute to the school's positive learning environment. Furthermore, teachers cannot create a democratic classroom in an autocratic school. They cannot teach interpersonal respect when they are treated disrespectfully by administrators, and they cannot set high standards for students if administrators set low standards for them.

School-Parent-Community Relationships → Parents and community members should feel that their school has a welcoming environment. It should be accessible and open to parent participation, recognize parents' expertise and provide opportunities for their contributions. Effective communication and collaboration with parents and the community will promote better outcomes for students. Research demonstrates that parental support and value of education is a consistent predictor of children's academic achievement. These outcomes are enhanced when the entire community values education and demonstrates support for its schools.

How Does School Climate Affect Student Outcomes?

Knowing that students' perceptions of school climate are related to their behavioral and emotional problems is important, but understanding the processes or mechanisms that underlie this relationship is critical to developing effective interventions to improve school climate. One of the mechanisms that may explain how school climate affects individual outcomes is school connectedness. School connectedness is defined as student perceptions of belonging and closeness with others at the school. Some researchers consider school connectedness a component of school climate, but others suggest that it is a factor that intervenes between school climate and student outcomes to explain their relationship. According to the latter perspective, high-quality school climates cultivate a connection to the school and in this way protect youths from negative outcomes. That is, quality of school climate impacts student feelings of connectedness to the school and, in turn, the level of connectedness is directly predictive of how students behave and feel. Empirical research supports this perspective and shows that school connectedness explains or accounts for the school climate effects.

Given that student perceptions of the school climate may counteract certain risk factors, understanding how students feel about their school is an important first step in decreasing the probability of negative student outcomes. However, given the numerous components that comprise school climate and the prohibitive nature of assessing the perceptions of each one, research indicates that interventions focused on increasing students' sense of connectedness or belonging to the school may be an effective means of decreasing behavioral and emotional problems.

How can school personnel increase students' sense of belonging? Various ideas have been proposed, including

- Increasing school safety and improving interpersonal relationships by adopting violence-prevention and conflict-resolution programs;
- Increasing student, teacher, and staff acceptance of diversity;
- Treating students with care, fairness, and consistency;
- Promoting student decision-making skills, individual and civic responsibility, and commitment to the larger school community; and
- Decreasing the emphasis on student competition.

Improving students' perceptions of school connectedness will not occur overnight and likely will require an extended period of time. But concerted effort can result in improved student behavioral and emotional functioning and, in turn, increased academic motivation and achievement.

Conclusions of the Study:

As per the study positive school cultures have better motivated teachers. Highly motivated teachers have greater success in terms of student performance and student outcomes. School principals seeking to improve student performance should focus on improving the school's culture by getting the relationships right between themselves, their teachers, students and parents. Measuring school climate and using these assessments to focus the school's goals on learning is important for the process of improving the school's academic performance.

REFERENCES

- Attar-Schwartz, S. (2009). Peer sexual harassment victimization at school: The roles of student characteristics, cultural affiliation, and school factors. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 79, 407–420.
- Boe, E. E., Cook, L. H., & Sunderland, R. J. (2008). Teacher turnover: Examining exit attrition, teaching area transfer, and school migration. *Exceptional Children*, 75, 7–31.
- Bradshaw, C.P., Mitchell, M. M., & Leaf, P. J. (2010). Examining the effects of School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports on student outcomes: Results

from a randomized controlled effectiveness trial in elementary schools. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 12, 133–148.

- Brand, S., Felner, R., Shim, M., Seitsinger, A., & Dumas, T. (2003). Middle school improvement and reform: Development of validation of a school-level assessment of climate, cultural pluralism and school safety. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95, 570–588.
- Brown, K. E., & Medway, F. J. (2007). School climate and teacher beliefs in a school effectively serving poor South Carolina (USA) African-American students: A case study. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23, 529–540.
- Olweus, D. (2005). A useful evaluation design, and effects of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 11, 389–402.
- Olweus, D., Limber, S. P., Flerx, V. C., Mullin, N., Riese, J., & Snyder, M. (2007). *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program: Schoolwide guide*. Center City, MN: Hazelden.
- Pianta, R., La Paro, K., & Hamre, B. (2008). *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), Manual: Pre-K*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing Co.
- Rigby, K. (2007). *Children and Bullying: How parents and educators can reduce bullying at school*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Ruus, V., Veisson, M., Leino, M., Ots, L., Pallas, L., Sarv, E., & Veisson, A. (2007). Students' well-being, coping, academic success, and school climate. *Social Behavior & Personality: An International Journal*, 35, 919–936.
- Stewart, E. B. (2008). School structural characteristics, student effort, peer associations, and parental involvement: The influence of school- and individual-level factors on academic achievement. *Education & Urban Society*, 40, 179–204.
- Sugai, G., & Horner, R. (2006). A promising approach for expanding and sustaining school-wide positive behavior support. *School Psychology Review*, 35, 245–259.
- Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2013). A review of school climate research. *Review of Educational Research*, 83, 357–385.
- Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Higgins-D'Alessandro, A., & Guffy, S. (2012, August). *School climate research summary (Issue Brief No. 3)*. Bronx, NY: National School Climate Center.
- Deal, T. E. and Peterson, K. D. (1999) *Shaping School Culture: The Heart of Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass).
- Donaldson, G. A., Jr (2001) *Cultivating Leadership in Schools: Connecting People, Purpose, and Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press).
- DuFour, R. and Eaker, R. (1998) *Professional Learning Communities at Work* (Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service).
- DPS-DCTA Partnership. (2003). Task force on school and district climate. Retrieved from [http://dps-dcta.dpsk12.org/stories/storyreader\\$63](http://dps-dcta.dpsk12.org/stories/storyreader$63)
- Earthman, G. I. (2004). *Prioritization of 31 criteria for school building*. MD: American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Maryland.
- Edgerson, E. D., & William, A. K. (2006). Analysis of the influence of principals relationships on student academic performance: A national focus. *National Journal for Publishing and Mentioning Doctoral Students*, 1(1).
- Edmunds, R. R. (1982). Programs of school improvement: An overview. *Educational Leadership Journal*, 40(3), 4–11.
- Freiberg, H. J. (1998). Measuring school climate: Let me count the ways. *Leadership*, 56(1), 22–26.
- Gonder, P., & Hymes, D. (1994). *Improving school climate and culture*. Virginia: America Group of School Administration.
- Epstein, J. L., & McPartland, J. M. (1976). The concept and measurement of quality of school life. *American Educational Research Journal*, 13, 15–30.
- Haynes, N. M., Emmons, C., & Comer, J. P. (1993). *Elementary and middle school climate survey*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Child Study Center.
- Sinclair, R. L. (1970). Elementary school educational environments: Toward schools that are responsive to students. *National Elementary Principal*, 49, 53–58.